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ABSTRACT

Black newspapers, like the "Chicago Defender," "The Pittsburgh Courier," and the "Baltimore Afro-American," opened the eyes of Americans to the injustices suffered at home as well as in the armed services. The black press attacked the Navy for its Jim Crowism because when World War II began, the only black sailors were messmen. It attacked the Red Cross for segregating blood by the donor's race. The black war correspondents during World War II had extra problems, but they accepted the challenges of locating and writing about black troops. They were unable to cover the main thrust of the war because blacks seldom had a role in combat; instead they had tough, thankless jobs. Even though they did not win any journalistic prizes, black correspondents made the war easier to bear for the black soldiers and for their loved ones back home. The 27 black correspondents were given regular assignments for black papers or news organizations. The largest number of correspondents (10) went to North Africa and Italy to cover the two major black combat units. Some others worked in the Pacific Theater and Northern Europe, and a few covered such sideshows as Burma, Russia, and Alaska. (SW)

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JOHN D. STEVENS

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JOHN D. STEVENS is associate professor of journalism at the University of Michigan. He holds an A.B. degree from Indiana University, an M.A. from Washington State University and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. A former newspaperman, he is co-editor of *Mass Media and the National Experience* (1971) and co-author of *The Rest of the Elephant: Perspectives on the Mass Media* (1973), as well as many scholarly articles. This study was financed in part by a faculty research grant from the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies.

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Preface

> The record of the Negro war correspondents in World War II stands as a monument to the progress of the Negro Press. And when the history of this war is written they will have their share of the glory.
>
> Pittsburgh *Courier*
> May 12, 1945

MORE THAN a quarter-century later, the history of that war and its journalism has been written many times, but the 27 correspondents who represented the black newspapers still await their glory. Ignored by the general histories, some of the former correspondents have talked about writing their own books, but as the years passed they moved to other interests and other jobs and the books remained unwritten.

This is an attempt to right that record, to tell their story; it is not an attempt to tell the whole story of the 700,000 blacks who served all over the globe in that war or even of all the people who wrote about that war in the black papers. For example, many articles were contributed from the fighting fronts by former staff members serving in the military which are not discussed here, mostly for lack of space. The focus is on the major correspondents and how they did their work.

Much of the material in this monograph was obtained in interviews and through letters from the former correspondents. The author wishes to thank them and especially Henry LaBrie III, who interviewed John Jordan, Charles Loeb and Vincent Tubbs during his own research travels.

JOHN D. STEVENS

Ann Arbor, Michigan
June, 1972

The War at Home and Abroad

When the Pittsburgh *Courier* announced its "Victory at Home and Victory Abroad" campaign at the outset of World War II, many whites denounced it as taking advantage of the war emergency for "special interest" purposes. But the campaign reflected perfectly the mood in the black community.

Why did individuals and organizations never before involved in a protest movement respond with such unanimity?

First, they remembered that blacks postponed their demands in 1917 "for the sake of the war effort" and found themselves pleading to a deaf America, bent on returning to normalcy after the fighting stopped. Second, the economic disaster of the 1930s taught them how to make their protests felt. This time blacks, led by their newspapers, were going to exert pressures when the government, the military and the defense plants needed them.

In 1917-18, editors of the few black papers followed the lead of the NAACP's *Crisis* in urging blacks to prove their loyalty and citizenship so that they could reap benefits in the postwar years.[1] This time, neither the papers nor the organizations talked of waiting.

The black papers were at their peak of circulation and influence in the 1940s. The Pittsburgh *Courier* (350,000), the Chicago *Defender* (230,000), the Baltimore *Afro-American* (170,000) and the Norfolk *Journal and Guide* (100,000) were truly national weeklies, with regional editions available throughout much of the nation. While they attempted to chronicle black life, they also interpreted events from a black viewpoint and were far less committed to "objectivity" than white papers claimed to be. Since the early 1930s they had sought integration of the military,

[1] Lester M. Jones, "The Editorial Policy of Negro Newspapers of 1917-18 as Compared With That of 1941-42" *Journal of Negro History*, 29:24-31 (January 1944).

an objective they had reinforced by many reports from military bases about second-class treatment of black soldiers.

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, their focus, like that of the rest of the society, shifted to the war. The War Department summoned black editors to a conference, allegedly to discuss war aims, but really, according to an editorial in the *Defender*, to ask the editors to lead cheers for the war.[2] The editors promised nothing.

The black papers "covered" World War I by reprinting government handouts and letters from soldiers; this time the big papers, now much more secure economically, were determined to send their own correspondents to the battlefields as they had sent reporters to cover Africa, the Berlin Olympics of 1936 and the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1937-38.

The "Double V" concept never was forgotten. The papers pointed to discrimination in defense plants as readily as to "Jim Crow" in the army. Some 1.2 million blacks, mostly from the South, heeded the siren song of black papers about war-inflated wages in plants in the North and West.

The black worker remained, as he had in peace, the last hired and the first fired; nonetheless, black employment in manufacturing more than doubled between 1940 and 1944. By the end of the war, black workers were receiving equal pay for equal work. The Fair Employment Practices Commission was partly responsible for the improvements, overcoming endless obstacles. Price and wage controls helped, too, since inflation was only a third what it had been in the Civil War and three-fifths the rate of World War I.[3]

The black papers repeatedly tied Jim Crow symptoms at home to those in the military. For example, a front-page editorial in the *Afro-American* in the summer of 1942 linked reports of substandard living conditions near Gulfport shipyards, unequal hiring practices at defense plants, racist statements by Southern

[2] *Defender*, December 13, 1941.

[3] Louis Ruchames, *Race, Jobs and Politics: The Story of FEPC* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953); Jim F. Heath, "Domestic America During World War II: Research Opportunities for Historians," *Journal of American History* 58:403 (September 1971).

governors to uniformed GIs being beaten and jailed and congressional failure to repeal the poll tax. The paper added:

> It is squarely up to white Americans to awaken to the folly and danger of a situation which invites disaster. We can and WILL win the war when this "second front" is removed from our own shores and put where it belongs.[4]

The militancy, both of the black press and by black leaders, peaked in the bloody summer of 1943 when riots erupted throughout the nation, most tragically at Detroit. In the wake of the riots, white liberals assumed the leadership of many black groups (most notably the NAACP, which had seen its membership rise to 10 times its prewar figure) and the focus shifted from the streets to the courts and the halls of Congress. For whatever reason, racial violence did abate during 1944 and 1945.

Blacks fought in all of the nation's wars, beginning with the colonial militia engagements. Some 5,000 served as scattered individuals and in segregated units during the Revolution. Several thousand blacks saw duty in the War of 1812, and 180,000 served in the Union army during the Civil War. Four regiments of blacks battled the Indians on the Western Plains and then the Spaniards in Cuba. In each war, the pattern was the same: blacks were barred at first but welcomed when the manpower pinch came. In World War I, about three-fourths of the blacks served in labor units. The 93d Infantry Division, attached to the French, compiled an enviable record, as did two of the three regiments of the 92d Division. But the sub-par performance of that remaining regiment during the Meuse-Argonne offensive in August, 1918, shaped the Army's attitude toward the use of black troops: they should serve under white officers and are much better suited to labor than to combat.[5]

[4] *Afro-American*, August 29, 1942.

[5] Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of Nortl. Carolina Press, 1961); Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegration in the U. S. Armed Forces* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969); Arlen L. Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West 1869-1891* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1971); Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Never between the world wars did blacks constitute more than 6 per cent of the Army; even during World War II, their strength did not reach 10 per cent. The draft brought in men faster than all-black units could be formed and training sites found for them. There were about 100,000 blacks in the Army at the end of 1941 and five times that number one year later. Black draftees, with less schooling than their white counterparts, scored lower on the battery of mental examinations which determined assignments. That partly explains why so many went to support units; it also conveniently fitted the Army's concept of the proper role for black soldiers, a continuation of their ditch-digger and truck-driver role in civilian life.

John P. Roche, a respected constitutional scholar and social critic, has written:

> Negro soldiers were clearly the pack mules of the Army . . . Under the command of white officers who generally hated him, treated like a slave and discriminated against even in combat zones, the colored enlisted man had little to remind him that he was fighting for democracy against racism.[6]

In 1943 and 1944, the Army broke up many black combat units and converted them to service units. Secretary of War Henry Stimson admitted to a congressman that the black outfits were being converted because they were "unable to master efficiently the techniques of modern weapons." When the letter became public, it prompted a howl from the black press.[7]

Although hospitals, post exchanges, theatres and camp buses were—officially, at least—integrated, there were racial clashes over their use at many Army and Navy bases because a black GI fraternized with a white girl. On runs into town, "back-of-the-bus" was the law. Jackie Robinson, who later cracked the major league color barrier, was nearly court-martialed when a driver, thinking Lt. Robinson was accompanying a white woman, picked a fight and then turned him into the MPs. The incident blew over but illustrates the harrassment near Southern camps, especially for "uppity" officers.

[6] John P. Roche, *Quest for the Dream* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 206.

[7] Dalfiume, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-97.

Many Southern towns were equally hostile to black newspapers. For example, the mayor of a town in South Carolina told a *Defender* salesman: "Since these damn Yankee soldiers have been coming down here, they've been putting hell in you niggers. I don't want one of those damn nigger papers sold around here." Camp Rucker and Camp Shelby, among others, banned the sale of all black papers for a time.[8]

When Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) inquired of Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) if it was fair for the Army to station so many blacks far from black population centers, White replied: "The Negro soldier would rather be in a Northern camp than be subjected to the things he is encountering in the camps of the South."[9]

Army air officials insisted blacks lacked the technical ability to fly combat planes, but thanks to almost continuous pressure from the black press and black leaders, an all-black unit was established. The first five black pilots were graduated from the segregated base at Tuskegee Institute and, with crews trained in Illinois, formed the 99th Fighter Squadron. In the spring of 1943, the so-called "Spookwaffe" went to North Africa and that summer began flying combat missions. It clearly was the blacks' glamour unit of the war as it supported the drive through Sicily and Italy.[10]

Special bitterness was aimed at the Navy for its Jim Crowism. When the war began, the only black sailors were messmen; even when it ended, 90 per cent were still messmen, although a few token warships had predominantly black crews. The Marine Corps ended its lily-white policy in 1942, but only 16,000 blacks served in the corps during the war, almost all in non-combat roles. Black women found it difficult to enlist as nurses or in the military auxiliaries.

Officer Candidate Schools never were segregated during the war. Although there were relatively few black students, there

[8] *Defender*, September 11, 1943.

[9] White to Baldwin, February 3, 1942, in ACLU Papers.

[10] Charles E. Francis, *The Tuskegee Airmen* (Boston: Bruce Humphries Inc. 1955), pp. 11-30; Lee Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Line* (New York: Random House, 1954), pp. 46-50.

were even fewer problems from sharing facilities, and the success was later used in arguing for full integration, which came after President Truman's 1948 executive order. During World War II, a few black leaders actually urged segregated officer training for fear that was the only way blacks could get their share of commissions.[11]

Black editors complained that the Office of War Information (OWI) sent out pictures and stories of black GIs only digging ditches or peeling potatoes; the fact that so many of the black soldiers were stuck with doing precisely that only made the OWI's practice more bitter to swallow. Complaints were especially loud on two occasions: when it was revealed OWI sent all "black interest" newsreel footage to a small newsreel firm catering to black moviehouses (thus effectively eliminating such material from general newsreels) and when OWI distributed an English-French dictionary to soldiers which contained "nigger." The papers universally praised OWI for its 1944 film, *The Negro Soldier*, which the *Courier* called "refreshingly free of condescension or Uncle Tomism."[12]

The same could not be said of all government agencies. In February, 1942, the Navy shamefacedly recalled a poster which used a Ubangi to illustrate its message of "A Slip of the Lip May Sink a Ship" and the next month the Treasury Department issued a bond brochure which showed no blacks among the 21 children on the cover. The Treasury also sent out mats of a fat mammy with this appeal:

A cheerful old mammy
Named Hannah
Who'd lived 80 years
In Savannah
Said 'Sho 'nuff, I'll buy
bonds cause ah
Am in love with the Star
Spangled Bannah.

[11] Robert H. Brisbane, *The Black Vanguard* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1970), p. 164; Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[12] *Courier*, March 7 and November 28, 1942; *Defender*, September 26, 1942, January 2 and May 29, 1942, January 22 and June 18, 1944.

Although they voiced their disapproval, many black editors ran the mammy ad, as they did other editorial puffs and free ads for bond and charity drives. The Red Cross was never popular with blacks, especially in the early months of the war, when the papers were filled with attacks on the Red Cross's patently stupid policy of segregating blood by the donor's race.

Walter White was shocked when in December, 1942, President Roosevelt told him the Justice Department might indict some black editors for sedition and for obstructing the war effort; however, they never did so, although the FBI investigated alleged "foreign funding" on at least two small black militant papers. Later, White urged FDR to make sure that no black paper was being shorted on its newsprint allocation because of its printed criticisms.[13]

Publishers of several black newspapers demanded to see and saw key government officials during the war, thus breaking the traditional stranglehold which the NAACP and a few other "spokesmen" had enjoyed. This was an important step in opening lines of communication between the government and the black community.

It is a difficult tightrope to walk, especially in the midst of a war: to support the war aims and at the same time criticize the workings of the government. The black papers were fiercely loyal, but at the same time they were determined to push for equal opportunities both in civilian and military life. As one historian put it: "Within the Negro press, there was disagreement as to strategy and means but the end, to make an unfree world free by ending racial discrimination *during the emergency* was clear and held in common."[14]

The Army's official history of the war praised the black press, both for carrying information about the black troops and for building the morale of the soldiers and the folks back home. It also praised the role of the black press before the war in telling

[13] Walter White, *A Man Called White* (New York: Viking Press, 1948), pp. 206-7; *Courier*, March 14, 1942.

[14] Herbert Garfinkel, *When Negroes March* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), p. 25. Italics his.

the youths who would become the black soldiers about their chances in the military.[15]

Their campaign to gain recognition for accomplishments of black soldiers and sailors began with Pearl Harbor. The *Courier* led a campaign to award the Congressional Medal of Honor to Dorie Miller, a black messman who left the galley and took over an anti-aircraft gun during the attack. He finally received the Navy Cross. There were similar campaigns throughout the war, and if the black papers could be faulted for one thing it was overpraising black units, so much so that they could not live up to the expectations created for them.

But all of this was editorial policy stuff. What the black papers knew they wanted was their own correspondents on the battle fields; and, for the first time, they got them.

[15] Ulysses G. Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1966), p. 86.

The Black Correspondents

GIVEN THEIR DUAL role of reporter and advocate, the black war correspondents faced a dilemma. GIs were always telling them about mistreatment and racial discrimination, and the writers saw enough to know there was a basis for at least some of the complaints. On the other hand, their primary job was to report, and to do that, they needed cooperation from the white officers for travel, housing and transmitting their stories. To their credit, the black journalists chose the "damn-the-torpedoes" route and filed dozens of exposés of racial injustice in the military. A few of them were rebuked, and censors removed some details from their dispatches, but none of the correspondents ever lost his accreditation. In retrospect, most of them agree they were treated well and that their copy was not censored much more than that of the white writers.

This study concentrates on 27 correspondents who were on regular assignment for black papers or news organizations. It does not include free-lancers, blacks working for service publications, or such "special writers" for white publications as novelist Roi Ottley or Walter White of the NAACP. (Correspondents are listed in Table 1.)

The first black accredited by the American government was Edgar Rouzeau of the Pittsburgh *Courier*, who headed for Europe in 1942; however, the Russians accredited Homer Smith (pseudonym: Chatwood Hall) in 1939, and many black papers carried his dispatches from the Eastern Front long before Pearl Harbor. Vincent Tubbs of the Baltimore *Afro-American* was the first black journalist in the Pacific, arriving in March, 1943.

Both the *Courier* and the *Afro-American* sent seven correspondents, while the Chicago *Defender* and the Norfolk *Journal & Guide* dispatched four and three, respectively. Smith served various papers from Moscow as did George Padmore from

TABLE 1

ROSTER OF CORRESPONDENTS

Name and Assignment(s)	*Present Position*
Baltimore Afro-American	
Art Carter, Mediterranean, 1943-44	Associate Editor, *Afro-American*
Herbert Frisby, Alaska, 1943-44	Unknown
Max Johnson, Mediterranean, 1943-44	Unknown
Bettye Phillips, London 1945	Vice-President, *Afro-American* (Mrs. E. M. Moss)
Ollie Stewart, Mediterranean, 1942-45; Northern Europe, 1945	Free-lance writer, Paris
Vincent Tubbs, Pacific, 1943-45; Northern Europe, 1945	Movie publicist, Hollywood
Francis Yancey, Pacific, 1945	Unknown
Chicago Defender	
Deton Brooks, China-Burma-India, 1944-45	Human Resources commissioner, Chicago
David Orro, London, 1943	Unknown
Ed Toles, Northern Europe, 1944-45	Federal bankruptcy referee, Chicago
Enoc Waters, Pacific, 1943-45	Information specialist, Department of Health, Education and Welfare
Norfolk Journal & Guide	
Lem Graves, Mediterranean, 1944-45	Broadcast section head, United States Information Agency
John Jordan, Mediterranean, 1944-45	Editor, *Journal & Guide*
T. W. Young, Mediterranean, 1943	Deceased
Pittsburgh Courier	
Haskell Cohen, Mediterranean, 1944	Head, New York public relations firm
Randy Dixon, Northern Europe, 1943-44	Deceased
Collins George, Mediterranean, 1944-45	Music critic, Detroit *Free Press*
Ollie Harrington, Mediterranean, 1943-44	Cartoonist, Paris
Edgar Rouzeau, Mediterranean, 1942-43	Deceased
Billy Rowe, Pacific, 1944-45	PR firm head, NYC; columnist, NY *Amsterdam News*
Ted Stanford, Northern Europe, 1944-45	Deceased
Pool Correspondents (ANP, NNPA)	
Frank Bolden, Iran, 1944; CBI, 1945	Public relations, Pittsburgh public schools
Rudy Dunbar, Northern Europe, 1943-45	Unknown
Homer Smith ("Chatwood Hall"), Moscow, 1941-45	Textbook editor, Chicago
Charles Loeb, Pacific, 1944-45	Editor, Cleveland *Call & Post*
Fletcher Martin, Pacific, 1943-45	USIA, Kenya
George Padmore, London, 1941-45	Deceased

London. Four pool correspondents represented the National Negro Publishers Association and the Associated Negro Press. ANP had more than 100 client papers at the time.[1]

Black newspapers were so competitive that many doubted whether they could agree to pool war correspondents. Charley Cherokee in his *Defender* column commented in 1943:

> Negro publishers' plan to pool their war correspondents interests the War Department because it would relieve pressure for adequate appointments and better assignments. If this plan should succeed, which it probably won't, mark it down as a milestone, chum, because it would be the first time cooperation for mutual benefit has taken precedent over cut-throat competition in Negro business.[2]

Two of the pool correspondents already had been accredited to their own papers before OWI convinced their employers to share their dispatches. Frank Bolden of the *Courier* went to Iran and the China-Burma-India Theater for ANP, and Fletcher Martin of the Louisville *Defender* covered the South Pacific for NNPA. Even the editors sometimes mixed up ANP and NNPA in the credit lines.

Most of the stories filed, whether by pool or exclusive correspondents, were human interest features, or "Ernie Pyle stuff" as several called them. The black weeklies knew they could not compete with the dailies for hard news coverage of the war, so they were content with features, most of which were received by mail. For an occasional blockbuster, the correspondents used the expensive cable facilities.

The largest number of correspondents (10) went to North Africa and Italy to cover the two major black combat units, the 92d Infantry and 332d Fighter Squadron. The others were divided about equally between the Pacific Theater and Northern Europe, with a few covering such sideshows as Burma, Russia and Alaska.

[1] ANP lasted until 1966, mostly with African and United Nations news. Richard L. Beard and Cyril E. Zoerner II, "Associated Negro Press: Its Founding, Ascendency and Demise," *Journalism Quarterly* 46:1 (Spring 1969), pp. 47-52.

[2] *Defender*, September 18, 1943.

What was the typical correspondent like? He was young (middle 20s), fairly well-educated and, by black standards, middle-class. He became a journalist almost by accident, attracted by the chance for travel, adventure and fame. After the war, he would move on to a good job, often in government.

The correspondents came from all kinds of backgrounds. Deton Brooks had tried hard, but unsuccessfully, to get into West Point to achieve the commission which had eluded his father, a career soldier. He enlisted, but while awaiting call was injured in a playground ballgame; he decided his best chance to get overseas was to be a correspondent for the *Defender*. On the other hand, Collins George served two years in a Conscientious Objector camp before joining the *Courier* to cover the closing months of the war in Italy.[3]

The *Defender's* attorney, Ed Toles, accompanied the paper's publisher to Washington on a mission to speed the accreditation of black reporters and almost by accident got himself on the approved list. Toles, now a federal bankruptcy judge, admits that he did not know much about reporting at the time, but he learned fast while covering Europe.[4]

Accreditation usually took four to six weeks, but for Enoc Waters of the *Defender* it took longer. Someone in the War Department halted his credentials because of Walters' alleged Communist ties. The only "tie" was coverage Waters had given to the black who was running for vice-president in 1940 on the Communist Party ticket. Once the publisher provided evidence that Waters' expenses were paid by the paper and not the party, he was cleared.[5]

Rudy Dunbar, a West Indian living in London, wanted a front-row seat for the war and became the London bureau chief for ANP.

Art Carter of the *Courier* sent back not only war dispatches but his regular sports column.

The black journalists were prolific. Often there would be six or more major by-lined articles from a correspondent in one

[3] Brooks interview, Chicago, June 17, 1971; George interview, Ann Arbor, November 11, 1970.

[4] Toles interview, Chicago, June 18, 1971.

[5] Waters interview, Washington, D.C., August 25, 1971.

issue. Although they competed with one another, they also cooperated in most theaters, often sharing transportation and lodgings. With few exceptions, they got along famously with the white correspondents, especially since they were not in direct competition.

Although there were no accredited black combat photographers, Ollie Harrington of the *Courier* sent back battlefield sketches from Southern Europe. (He still draws a cartoon panel for the *Courier*.) There were at least three "unofficial" photographers among the black correspondents: Charles Loeb of ANP, John Jordan of the *Journal & Guide* and Billy Rowe of the *Courier*. Jordan tells this story:

> We weren't supposed to take pictures, but, being ignorant black reporters, we took our cameras with us. I caught the devil many times, but you see, nobody cared much at first. They figured to themselves, "Well, black papers—who are they competing with anyway?" But when we started sending out combat pictures, with terrific action, all the big papers started using them and everyone started wondering where they came from. Even *Stars & Stripes* printed my stuff. So they started asking, "Who's this John Jordan?" And they couldn't find me listed as an accredited photographer. I received a directive to not carry the camera anymore, and I told them I sure wouldn't. But, I did anyway.[6]

Jordan wrote extensively after his return from Europe, and he used his photos to illustrate his articles. Most of the other papers used official governmental photos for their war stories.

Rowe lost one of his two cameras when he went in with the first wave on the invasion of the Philippines. He asked to go in early because, as he put it, "I was tired of taking pictures of soldiers' butts. I wanted to get some faces."[7]

One white, Haskell Cohen, covered Italy for several months for the *Courier*. He had worked for the paper before and was an established magazine free-lance writer. One black woman, Elizabeth Murphy Moss (then Bettye Phillips), of the *Afro-American*, made it as far as London before illness forced her to return to the States without reaching the actual combat zone.

[6] Jordan interview, Norfolk, Va., July 6, 1971.
[7] Rowe interview, New York, November 1, 1971.

Ironically, the correspondents' job was made easier by the Army's strict segregation policies, policies which the papers decried week after week on the editorial pages. A correspondent could move into a new sector, get a list of black units and their locations, and head for them. That was impossible in integrated units which fought the Korean and Vietnam wars and is a partial explanation for the reduced coverage of them in the black papers.

Vincent Tubbs complained in 1943 of the difficulty of finding "our boys" on New Guinea because all the Yanks had such deep suntans and such heavy Australian accents.[8]

The black papers demanded constantly in their editorials a greater combat role for what they often termed "tan yanks;" the GIs themselves were understandably less enthusiastic. Several soldiers told Enoc Waters of the *Defender* in New Guinea that they wished his paper would find another topic. "A lot of them weren't anxious to get in combat, but some of them actually strayed off and joined unofficially with white combat units on patrols," he says. Lem Graves of the *Journal & Guide* found the same kind of mixed feelings in Italy. "I don't recall a clearcut preference," he says. "Some got much more combat than they wanted."[9]

A few of the journalists wanted to be relieved after a short stint in a combat zone, but in late 1943, Tubbs wrote: "This correspondent wants no help or interference, no vacation or relief. Soldiers don't rest, and correspondents are nothing more than glorified GIs."[10] True to his word, after coming home from the Pacific, he headed for Europe, the only black correspondent to cover both theaters.[11]

Most correspondents praise the cooperation they received from their military hosts. For example, Lem Graves was given his own

[8] *Afro-American*, August 28, 1943.

[9] Waters interview; Graves interview, Washington, D.C., August 26, 1971.

[10] *Afro-American*, December 18, 1943.

[11] Tubbs believes a three-month tour of five African nations which he made between his Pacific and European stints was his most important. With P. B. Young, Jr., of the *Journal & Guide* and P. B. Cashin, an executive of the *Defender*, he looked at colonial policies on behalf of the State Department. Tubbs interview, Los Angeles, August 21, 1971.

jeep in Italy and never did have to return it. Deton Brooks says that when a white officer objected to sharing the press hostel in Calcutta, the other journalists chased out the objector. Enoc Waters found that even officers from the Deep South were solicitious: "I think they figured we had a lot more influence than we really did. They knew we went down to headquarters a lot."[12]

Ollie Stewart, who covered Africa and Europe for the *Afro-American*, however, remains bitter about his treatment:

> How could I (or the rest) do any kind of job when there were bastards like the white colonel who had charge of billeting the night we came ashore in Oran, and ignored the air raid as soon as he saw me to yell: "No black sonofabitch is going to sleep under the same roof with me." He was supposed to take care of the correspondents; instead, he separated me from the men I'd worked with for three months and shoved me into a hotel three blocks away.[13]

Regardless of what part of the world they were in, the correspondents found that racial tensions increased with distance from the war zone. Men who got along quite well in or near combat would brawl when they got back to rest areas or cities. It was in reporting such clashes that the blacks ran into a few problems with military censors; but for the most part they agree the censorship was administered evenly on all journalists, regardless of race. A censor in India in 1945 refused to transmit Deton Brooks' story about a military swimming pool which was reserved on alternate days for blacks and for whites. Brooks threatened to notify his paper and to demand an investigation, both of the pool and of the censorship. The officer's ears turned red, but he filed the story. The pool was integrated soon after the *Defender* published it.[14]

Ed Toles learned that after he exposed the fact that black nurses in England were being assigned only to tend German prisoners, the censors were all told to check his future dispatches "extra carefully." Collins George had a run-in with the commander of the 92d Division for reporting on a Jim Crow officers'

[12] Graves, Brooks and Waters interviews.

[13] Ollie Stewart (personal communication), May 22, 1971.

[14] Brooks interview. The article appeared July 14, 1945.

club, but he saved his real salvos for a series after the surrender; by then, there was no censorship.[15]

Black GIs welcomed the writers. Not only did they represent a tie with home, they were often the first black officers the men had seen. (All correspondents had simulated ranks and wore officers' uniforms and insignia.) They generally wanted two things from the journalists, although not always in the same order: to get their names in the paper so their friends and relatives would know they were all right, and to have the correspondents convey their grievances to their white officers. There was no problem with the first request, since the correspondents and their editors knew that names made news. Many dispatches consisted of a paragraph or two of lead material and then a long list of names. The second was more delicate, but, as one of the correspondents said, "It went with the territory." Because they circulated freely between the officers and men, they were able to iron out many irritants, most of which were minor. A few, however, were not minor, as when the black laborers who had sweated and strained to open the Ledo Road were irate on seeing the first convoy with nothing but white drivers. Frank Bolden flew back to headquarters and arranged to have some black drivers join the convoy at the first stop.

It is not easy to glamorize a job like building roads or unloading cargo ships, but the newsmen did their best. Certainly they can be excused an occasional superlative such as "the best quartermaster laundry company in the entire theater."

Lem Graves considers the stories which dealt with "the important matters of the daily lives of countless foot-soldiers" the greatest contribution of the black press. The combat exploits were at least touched on in the general press, he says, but the human interest stories were never there. Likewise, Frank Bolden does not regret spending so much time covering service troops, since service troops played such a vital role in the war. But, he adds, "What caused anguish about these assignments in the hearts

[15] Toles and George interviews. The nurse article appeared November 16, 1944, and the series on the 92d ran between November 10 and December 1, 1945.

of Negroes was that it was their typical role in this country—the hodcarrier and the bearer of water."[16]

Some correspondents, however, wanted to cover combat so much that they went out looking for it. John Jordan often went with patrols of the 92d Division on missions behind enemy lines. Billy Rowe was decorated for leading a party of litter bearers who penetrated the New Guinea jungle to bring out wounded soldiers. Fletcher Martin joined an all-white Australian unit for an assault on New Guinea. "My editor wrote me to keep away from the fighting if there were no black troops involved," he says. "I might get killed, he said, and it would take NNPA three months to replace me."[17]

None of the black journalists was killed or even wounded in combat, but had many close calls. Billy Rowe saw the man next to him on New Guinea killed by a sniper and a tentmate killed by shrapnel from an artillery shelling. Randy Dixon of the *Courier* was pinned down for five days in a foxhole in France, and Lem Graves was caught in an artillery bombardment after entering a town in Italy he had been told was cleared. After one bombardment, Ollie Stewart wrote, "It's actually funny that I'm still living when I've died so many deaths in the past year."[18]

Almost all of them fell prey to accidents and illness. Deton Brooks nearly lost his life when the steering gave way on his jeep on a narrow mountain pass in Burma, but he escaped with minor injuries. Both Enoc Waters and Fletcher Martin were downed by malaria.[19]

Somehow they perservered, and they wrote a proud, if forgotten, chapter in the history of war correspondence—in Europe, in the Pacific and on some highways and byways. One, T. W. Young of the *Journal & Guide*, sailed with the USS Mason and its all-black crew in the fall of 1944; otherwise, the story was written on the land and in the air.

[16] Graves and Bolden interviews.

[17] Jordan and Rowe interviews; Fletcher Martin (personal communication), April 29, 1971.

[18] Rowe and Graves interviews; *Courier*, September 2, 1944; *Afro-American*, August 21, 1943.

[19] Brooks and Waters interviews; Martin (personal communication).

The Mediterranean

FOR BLACKS, the focus of World War II was the Mediterranean Theater. The largest—and most controversial—black combat unit, the 92d Infantry Division, fought in Italy, and the black glamour unit of the war, the 332d Fighter Squadron, supported the drive through Sicily and Italy. The black papers spilled more ink on the theater than any other.

More than a quarter million blacks served in 77 units in Europe, accounting for about 9 per cent of the personnel. Black units landed in North Africa in November, 1942, and later took part in assaults on Sicily, Corsica, Salerno, Anzio and the drive up the Italian peninsula. They also invaded southern France, and they drove across northern France.

Combat units, in addition to the 92d Division and the fighter group, were three batallions of field and one of anti-aircraft artillery, one tank and three tank destroyer batallions and a regiment of infantry converted to engineers. There also were 45 engineer and quartermaster units, seven ordinance outfits, four port units and nine specialized companies, plus some 700 black WACs.

A series of four correspondents covered Southern Europe for the *Courier:* Edgar Rouzeau, Ollie Harrington, Haskell Cohen and finally Collins George. Ollie Stewart represented the *Afro-American*, and was relieved by Art Carter, then Max Johnson and finally Tubbs from the Pacific. T. W. Young and Lem Graves covered for the *Journal & Guide* until relieved by John Jordan, who was in turn replaced by the return of Graves. The *Defender* had no correspondents in the theater, nor did the NNPA or ANP.

North Africa

One major strategy debate of the war was whether to concentrate on an assault through France or to hold off until the

"soft underbelly" of Europe had been pounded sufficiently. Generally, Americans favored the former, but the British were more cautious; in the end, Churchill had his way, so the first offensives of the war were in North Africa. Black artillery units pounded Rommel, and so did black support outfits.

The first black correspondent to arrive in the fall of 1942 was Ollie Stewart of the *Afro-American*. He landed at Oran in a group of nine journalists that also included A. J. Liebling of the *New Yorker* and Ernie Pyle of Scripps-Howard Newspapers. Pyle praised Stewart: "We all grew to like him very much on the trip. He lived in one of the two cabins with us, ate with us, played handball on deck with the officers, everybody was friendly to him, and there was no 'problem.' "[1]

Pyle may not have known about the "problem" that Stewart ran into it his first night in Oran when the white colonel in charge of press quarters forced him to spend the night three blocks away.[2]

His first several dispatches emphasized local color and pointed out the absence of black troops, a situation which had changed by February when he covered President Roosevelt's inspection of the troops at Casablanca and the arrival of the first black Red Cross workers. On April 10 he could report at last "this is a story I have wanted to write since I left America in August, 1942—the story of colored troops in actual combat, exchanging lead with the enemy." He told of a black artillery unit blasting a mountain stronghold, but he had to admit that he failed to get the names of the gunners before they moved out: "The next day I tried to find these lads for interviews, but they had moved on without leaving a forwarding address."

His editor published Stewart's letter to the staff, saying he got along fine with the other correspondents, but complaining, "Finding colored units or any unit while under fire is almost impossible. Nobody gives away such vital information, not even to correspondents—so when I do find colored boys in the forward areas, it is usually by accident."[3]

[1] Ernie Pyle, *Here is Your War* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1943), p. 6.

[2] Stewart (personal communication) May 22, 1971.

[3] *Afro-American*, April 24, 1943.

Throughout the hot summer of 1942, Stewart was the only black among the 75 American and British journalists in North Africa. General Eisenhower was vetoing the requests of all additional correspondents, fearing most of the 100 or more then in London would head for his theater. Stewart would spend two to three weeks gypsying around the front, then hitch a ride with some soldiers back to headquarters and spend the next week or so resting and writing.

He was joined in the fall by Edgar Rouzeau of the *Courier*, whose first dispatch from North Africa, published September 26, described the multi-national efforts to push out the Germans. The next week, he reported that "American colored doughboys have seen no fighting as yet on this continent, but every area they occupy is a potential field of battle," and he said they were proud of their role in moving the supplies.

In early 1943, Rouzeau spent several weeks interviewing native and Free French leaders in Liberia and was the only American journalist present to cover President Roosevelt's surprise visit to that republic. FDR inspected the 41st "Singing Engineers" unit, a black American outfit on security duty in Liberia, and, after lunch at the officers' mess, told the black mess sergeant it was the best meal he had had on the entire trip. Rouzeau was thrilled at shaking the Chief Executive's hand.[4]

T. W. Young of the Norfolk *Journal & Guide* also served a brief stint in North Africa in late 1943, sending back features about the black support troops, while George Padmore from London wrote many analyses for black newspapers about political implications of African developments. Some of these bordered on war dispatches, such as his report ("It has been learned here . . .") that black Senegalese soldiers were reinforcing the Allies on two key fronts in North Africa.

Sicily

Once Rommel was checked in Africa, the next campaign was Sicily, the big island off the toe of the Italian Boot. In July, 1943, Allied armies landed by sea and by air, and they fought mostly Germans during the six-week campaign. Montgomery's Eighth

[4] *Courier*, February 6, 1943.

Army went up the east coast and Lt. Gen. Patton's the other way; they converged at Mt. Etna and drove to Messina by mid-August.

Allied dead totalled less than 5,000, while the Axis lost 167,000. The campaign accomplished two goals: it assured Allied control of the Mediterranean, and it knocked Italy out of the war. The king ousted Mussolini and told the new prime minister to sue for peace. Gen. Eisenhower announced the surrender September 8.

Black troops were not in direct combat, although an over-eager *Courier* editor published a photo of black engineers on July 31, identifying them as "the first black units in combat in Sicily."

Stewart and Rouzeau vyed with one another in praising black support troops, Stewart saying the quartermasters and engineers "are still setting records in heat and dust" and accompanying an ordnance unit in a 12-mile drive over mined roads to deliver hay to horses and mules hauling big guns to the front, while Rouzeau was hailing black chemical units for their smokescreens.[5]

The Fighter Pilots

Although many army officials, including the Texan who was Assistant Secretary of War for Air, "knew" blacks could not fly warplanes, they bowed to political pressures and established a segregated air base at Tuskegee Institute, graduating the first five pilots in March, 1942. One of them was Benjamin C. Davis, son of the only black general in American history to that time, and he took command of the first black air unit, which finally arrived at Casablanca in April, 1943. "The Spookwaffe" received new P-40 fighters and trained for another month, while growing itchy for combat.[6]

As the Americans moved up Italy, the Davis squadron drew mostly support missions, vital but hardly glamorous. *Time* magazine intimated Sept. 26, 1943, that the Army was disappointed with the unit for not downing more enemy planes, and rumors

[5] *Afro-American*, August 7 and August 21, 1943; *Courier*, August 28, 1943.

[6] Charles E. Francis, *The Tuskegee Airmen* (Boston: Bruce Humphries Inc., 1955), pp. 11-30; Lee Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Front* (New York: Random House, 1954), pp. 46-50.

flew that the unit would be broken up.[7] Rouzeau sought to explain the squadron's status:

> You the reader of this article, can judge whether or not the squadron was an experiment. Here are some facts to guide you. White fighter squadrons, when ready to go abroad, are permanently linked up with other squadrons which are then permanently linked up with a group. The group is then attached to a wing, and the wing to a given air force, or at least to a theatre. The 99th went overseas as an orphan outfit. It was not linked up with any other squadron or with any particular group.
>
> It was pretty much as if the Army, having staked a million dollars on a Negro squadron, was waiting to see how the gamble would pan out before sinking more cash to organize a Negro group. Today there is a Negro fighter group, the 332d. Does that imply anything?
>
> With their P-40 Warhawks, our boys have made good at various types of operations. At dive-bombing, they are about as good as any other fighter outfit. When they were assigned to provide close cover for medium bombers traveling from Africa before Sicily was invaded, they stuck so tenaciously to the bombers, even through the heaviest anti-aircraft fire, that bomber crews everywhere were soon requesting that the colored squadron be assigned to escort them over.
>
> They have made good on shore patrols. They had the job of flying "umbrella" over our shipping during the invasion of Italy by Gen. Clark's Fifth Army. Today they are being used as aerial artillery, dive-bombing and strafing in front of Gen. Montgomery's Eighth Army so as to blast a path for the ground forces.
>
> Our boys are credited with only one enemy plane destroyed, but this is not their fault. To shoot down enemy planes, you must have some enemy planes around to shoot at. When our boys first went into action, the German air force had been weakened considerably. Nowadays the Nazis are taking good care of the few fighter planes they have. They no longer send them up to pick fights just for the fun of it.[8]

The War Department in October asked commanders throughout the world how blacks were doing in combat. Most replied accurately that there was too little experience from which to generalize; however, air officials were ready to write off the fighter

[7] *Afro-American*, June 26, 1943.
[8] *Courier*, December 11, 1943.

squadron and break it up. Col. Davis testified October 16 that his unit was understaffed (26 pilots, compared to 35 in comparable white squadrons) and had made some mistakes in its early combat but that it had grown aggressive and was now ready to perform well.[9]

Any decision about the fate of the unit was postponed; in the meantime the black pilots supported the invasion of Anzio, south of Rome, on January 22, and in five minutes knocked down five German fighters. Morale zoomed with three more kills in the afternoon, and by February 16, the outfit claimed 17 definite and four probable kills. Art Carter described the war-weary pilots' excitement as "like football players bursting into a dressing room after a triumph in the season's classic."[10]

By the time Gen. Arnold visited the unit in December, its morale was high, with many men volunteering for extensions of their tours beyond the required 50 missions. The squadron was now fighting as one part of the experienced 79th Fighter Group, and, in spite of much fog and rain, was getting plenty of combat. The black group had 20 of the unit's 50 P-38s. The performance mooted the reports recommending the dissolution of the black flying program.[11]

But the excitement faded quickly; throughout the first half of 1944 the black flyers did routine patrolling, and many longed for real combat. The absorption of the 99th into the larger all-black 332d Fighter Group, also commanded by Davis, had little real effect.

Lem Graves replaced Young for the *Journal & Guide* in February, and Max Johnson replaced Carter for the *Afro-American* in June, but the new men had no more luck than Harrington, who stayed on for the *Courier*, in finding anything more exciting than promotions, missions, accidents and the weather to report. With the invasion of southern France in mid-August, all that changed. Harrington and John Jordan (who had replaced Graves) were pool correspondents for the invasion, and they were soon joined by Johnson.

[9] Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 552-61.
[10] *Afro-American*, March 5, 1944.
[11] Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 466-7.

Jordan showed his ingenuity by getting in a tow plane instead of an invading glider. He watched the gliders go in and then flew on to Cannes to file his story; otherwise he would have had to wait two or three days to get his story out.[12]

During the closing weeks of the European war, the 332d was in the thick of the fight. On March 24, with Col. Davis flying the lead, the unit flew cover for B-17s on a 1,600-mile round-trip attack on a tank works near Berlin. It was the longest mission in the history of the 15th Air Force. Graves' copy burst with pride:

> Claiming their first jet plane victories of the war, the 332d Fighter Group pilots under command of Col. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., broke into the monopoly held by other 15th Air Force units by knocking down three jet planes in a spectacular mission to Berlin.
>
> The Negro Mustang pilots provided target cover for the largest bomber mission in the history of the European War when 15th heavies, operating from Italian bases, blasted targets in Berlin . . .
>
> The flyers got their first glimpse of the battered Nazi capital, but did not pay so much attention to the scenery that they failed to see the speedy jet planes coming in at the bombers . . .[13]

The 332d received the Distinguished Unit Citation for its work that day. A week later, the Spookwaffe strafed Munich and downed 13 more planes; over Austria the very next day, they downed 12. The unit concluded its combat on April 26 with four more kills.[14]

Maintaining any all-black unit is wasteful, but the waste is more marked in one requiring highly trained men. For lack of replacements of the "right color," some black pilots flew 100 or more missions while eager white pilots cooled their heels in replacement depots—thus frustrating both blacks and whites. At other times, a black flying unit would have a surplus of a certain type of maintenance expert while the white unit next door was short, but was over-strength in some specialty which the 332d needed.[15]

[12] Jordan interview; *Journal & Guide*, August 9, 1944.
[13] *Journal & Guide*, March 31, 1945; see also *Afro-American*, same date.
[14] Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 521.
[15] Francis, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-5.

The 450 black pilots who made it overseas flew more than 15,000 sorties and 1,500 missions. They destroyed 111 planes in the air and another 150 on the ground, but what they accomplished went deeper than that: they proved blacks could make it in the air force to come.

Col. Davis credited the squadron's high morale to its publicity and to its sense of mission. He told a 1943 press conference, "All members of this organization were impressed at all times with the knowledge that the future of the colored man in the Air Corps probably would be dependent largely upon the manner in which they carried out their mission."[16]

Italy

Many a GI, black and white, must have wondered why the Allies were attempting what no general in history had ever dared before, namely to conquer Italy from south to north. The Boot, with its natural defense perimeters at Cassino, south of the Po Valley and the Alps, was not made for armies to conquer, particularly not mechanized ones. Many military strategists, then and now, also question the wisdom of the campaign, although it tied down 25 German divisions and provided airbases for bombers. To the soldiers who fought there, Italy will always mean mud, snow and heavily defended mountains.

Complicating the task was the relatively low priority assigned the Italian front; most of the supplies and men were going to England for the cross-channel buildup. Bombing proved relatively impotent against mountain defenses. Historian Chester G. Starr wrote:

> To gain a correct picture of Fifth Army one must visualize it not as a thin fighting line but as a zone up to 50 miles deep, slowly advancing up the Italian peninsula—an armored borer, as it were, with a steel cutting edge fed and kept going by a great mass of machinery. Three-fourths of the men were not at the front edge.[17]

A large share of those "other three-fourths" were black engineers, quartermasters and other service troops; but in Italy, at

[16] Quoted in Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

[17] *From Salerno to the Alps* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), p. 371.

last, the black infantryman came into his own, although only in the last months of the campaign.

A black quartermaster battalion hit the beach at Salerno under fire in October, 1944, in the wake of the first assault wave. Under pounding of artillery and bombers, they set up supply dumps and salvaged huge amounts of abandoned equipment. A German plane crashed in their midst and killed several men, and a sergeant was decorated for keeping his men at the task of unloading barges in the midst of battle. Two months later, the 450th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, the first black combat unit to land in Europe, was cited for knocking down two German bombers attacking Allied ships in Naples harbor.[18]

But the eyes of the black correspondents and their readers were on the 92d Infantry Division, activated in late 1942 and trained at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The division topped off its training by participating in the Louisiana maneuvers in early 1944, and the first elements headed overseas in June. More followed until the division was reorganized in Italy in November, 1944.

John Jordan covered the arrival of the 370th Combat Team, a unit of the 92d, and accompanied it into the lines; so did Max Johnson and Art Carter. They stayed with the troops during their initiation into battle, mostly on patrols but also in the capture of Monte Catiglione, a height west of Seravezza, near Massa.

When the advance bogged down, Ollie Harrington attempted to explain why:

> Driving relentlessly through towering mountain crags swept by autumn downpours and thrown into stark relief by hellish blue flashes of lightning, this combat team out of the 92nd division has gained a firm foothold in the battle for these mountains. They have crawled and cursed and fought their way, hill by overtowering hill, straight into the supposedly impregnable Gothic line, watching with grim satisfaction the Nazi flesh and bone and steel crumble in the face of their blistering hot machine guns and mortars.
>
> Smashing across the Arno three short weeks ago, a green and untried unit, they have paid a ghastly price for their apprenticeship. They have paid it on the line with many blanket-covered forms which mark

[18] Madeline L. Aldridge, "Let's Look at the Record," *Opportunity*, 23:1 (Winter 1945), p. 9.

their path and with the many others who lie grotesquely where they fell, hidden by the thorny underbrush.

I have come much of the way with these men and I would like to say that it has been a glorious advance, but it hasn't been. It has been a stumbling journey through a path of hell, seasoned with the horrible onrushing whine of Nazis 88s, fiendishly colored by the livid flash of machine gun fire spitting into our hunched backs from the dark clusters of wrecked farm houses and churches.

We know that from the heights above us, the Nazis could watch every move. The men have acted as all infantrymen act. They have plunged into filth-laden ditches along the roadsides when the shells came, and vomited when they crawled out to see the mess of those who had been too paralyzed by fear to plunge into the slime.

They have pressed machine gun and rifle triggers in panic, shooting down their own patrols in the moving brush up front. They have committed errors in judgment, such as forgetting that no matter how cautiously one crept among sniper-infested houses, one's shadow could be thrown ahead . . . an error usually corrected by smug Nazi machine gunners who wait until the shadow's owner creeps into view.

But they don't make errors like that anymore.[19]

The 370th arrived in time to take part in a general advance, but the advance ended when the Germans dug into their fortified mountain defenses. The month of October was pure hell. Cold rains turned the entire front into a quagmire, and German artillery and mortar shells did their share of raining too. Time after time, patrols of the 370th would capture a crag on Mount Caulala, only to fall back again. Morale dropped. General Almond blamed unit commanders, but the problems were deeper. The GIs simply had no confidence in their officers and vice-versa. There were inadequate black replacements, and most of those who did arrive were surly and uncooperative, further depressing morale.

By the end of October, the rest of the units of the 92d were in Italy and operational. Their assignment was to hold the relatively quiet sector near the ocean, protecting the vital port of Leghorn. Fifth Army had decided against a major winter offensive.

The 92d Division was composed entirely of newly activated

[19] *Courier*, September 30, 1944.

units. Except for the cadre, all men came directly from reception centers, and they included a higher percentage of low scorers on army standardization tests than any other division in the army. Its officers were almost all white, until late in the war when there were some blacks, and the correspondents agreed with the GIs that they included many racists.

On Christmas night, the Germans advanced along a six-mile mountain front, and in three days pushed the 92d Division back nearly five miles before being halted. General Clark called it the worst performance by any of his 11 divisions and used the incident to justify his attitudes against an integrated army.[20]

In February, the 92d made its second questionable showing in combat, this time at the Cinquale Canal. From February 1 through 11, the division attempted to capture the hills at Strettoia which dominated the coastal plain north of the canal. Both prongs of the attack stalled, the one with tanks along the coast and the other through the valley. Land mines immobilized many of the tanks. The real problem came when one regiment started falling back from a hill it had captured before its relief battalion was in real possession. The men going down the hill ran headon into those coming up, creating almost total confusion. The retreat turned into a rout, although other units captured and held their positions. The 74-hour attack cost eight officers (including two battalion commanders), 113 enlisted men and 22 tanks. The net result was almost no change in the front, but the effective end of the 92d. Rightly or wrongly, the army brass decided to chalk it off as a fighting force. Before it went into battle again, it would include black, white and even Japanese units.[21]

Then came the real bombshell. Truman K. Gibson, black civilian aide to the Secretary of War, went to Italy to check on the 92d. He told a press conference in Rome that there were valid reasons for the division's performance. He denies to this day that he applied the term "melted away" to the 92d, but that phrase certainly was attributed to him. Collins George did not quote him that way in the *Courier*, nor did the correspondents

[20] Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 562-7; Mark W. Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), p. 414.

[21] Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 568-72; *Journal & Guide*, April 14, 1945; *Courier*, February 17, 1945.

for the New York *Times*. George says the phrase was picked up from the story filed by the white correspondent for *Stars & Stripes*. But wherever it came from, it infuriated the black press and black soldiers around the world. Here was a black official accusing the 92d Division, *the* black division, of cowardice.[22]

While all black publications denounced Gibson and the white officers of the 92d Division that spring, two correspondents hit especially hard. Collins George said segregation was to blame for the bad performance; and, once censorship was lifted, he expanded this into a four-part series which called Gen. Almond a racist who tried to blame his tactical errors on his black troops. John Jordan, back at his desk in Norfolk, wrote a similar series on the bad relations he had seen between officers and men in the division.[23]

The debate would continue, especially in the postwar studies about integrating the military, a debate which was not settled until the Korean War.

During the final days of the war, George covered the 92d Division's capture of LaSpezia and hitchhiked a ride with some American troops, hot on the trail of fleeing Germans. Entering one town, they found partisans already had cleaned it up and accused them of being Germans in American uniforms. Once they had shown their identification, the Italians were delighted to greet them, the first Americans they had seen.[24]

[22] George interview; Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 575-9; Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 98; Dalfiume, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-8; New York *Times*, March 15, 1945.

[23] *Courier*, March 10 and November 10, 17 and 24 and December 1, 1945; *Journal & Guide*, April 21, April 28, May 5 and May 12, 1945.

[24] *Courier*, May 12, 1945.

Northern Europe

THE CAMPAIGN in the south was a tricky end run, but the drive across the English Channel, through France and into Berlin was a line plunge—simple, direct and devastating. But like a belly series in football, it was more effective against an opponent already shaken up.

American strategists never were very high on the Africa-Sicily-Italy approach, but they bowed first to British insistence and then to a lack of landing craft. By the time the Allies hit Normandy in June, 1944, they had almost total control of the air and had crippled the German transportation network; otherwise, they never could have ended the war within 11 months.

Although there were no large black infantry units in the theater, blacks were hastily organized into rifle platoons and had their only chance of the war to fight in integrated units in its closing weeks. This successful experiment helped offset some of the criticisms of the 92d Division in Italy. The first black tank unit accompanied Patton on his drive across northern Europe, and artillerymen gave good accounts of themselves. Blacks won kudos for operating the highly successful Red Ball Express and other support missions.

Randy Dixon represented the *Courier* from early 1943 until relieved two years later by Ted Stanford. David Orro spent 1943 in London for the *Defender* and was relieved by Toles, who followed the battles in Europe. George Padmore was pool correspondent in London and Rudy Dunbar on the Continent. Ollie Stewart moved up from the south before D-Day and reported the war in the theater; Vincent Tubbs and Bettye Phillips also made brief forays into northern Europe for the *Afro-American*.

Build-up in England

As the troop build-up began in the summer of 1942, the army worried about the influx of blacks, which by D-Day numbered 1.5

million. Padmore filed many dispatches about how well the soldiers were being accepted by the British civilians, many of whom had seen virtually no blacks before. Interracial dating became common and caused some friction, especially among the white American soldiers. When Eisenhower learned at his first press conference in London that censors refused to clear stories about such clashes, he ended the policy and later wrote, "Little real excitement was ever caused by ensuing stories." Although the theater commander insisted that leave and pass policies be administered evenly, officers in many units thwarted the intent by permitting passes on alternate days for men of the two races, thus Jim Crowing nearby towns.[1]

When Ollie Stewart arrived in September, 1942, the only two black officers he could find were both chaplains. On November 14 in the *Afro-American* he described the strange sensation of being in an almost all-white world and said there were fewer blacks in the British Isles than watched a Morgan State-Virginia State football game.

Although Orro seldom left London, Padmore, Dunbar, Dixon and Stewart spent time with the black truck, supply and engineer outfits and filed features about them. So did Toles when he replaced Orro at the end of 1943. Over and over, the correspondents described the eagerness of the black GIs for the opening of the second front.

Normandy Invasion

Months, even years, of planning went into the greatest invasion in the history of the world. The entire British Isles were like one gigantic mobilization base, ready to swing into action. On the night of June 4, Eisenhower conferred again with his weather experts. Things did not look good, but if he delayed, the tides would not be right for several more weeks. He gave the order.

British and American planes laid down the heaviest bombardments of the war, and all over England units were moving to their prearranged positions. On June 5, some 600 warships and 4,000 support vessels set sail. A cross-channel invasion of that

[1] Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 622-29; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948), pp. 58-9; A. J. Liebling, "The Rolling Umpty-Seventh," *New Yorker* 43:42 (December 5, 1942), pp. 52-66.

magnitude was a tremendous undertaking, one from which Hitler had shrunk three years earlier.

When on the morning of June 6 the troops hit the beaches at Normandy, the Germans decided it was a diversionary attack and that the main force would come at Pas de Calais, so they did not shift their defensive troops until it was too late. By nightfall the Allies landed 120,000 men, almost exactly one-tenth of them black. By the end of the first week, 300,000 men and 100,000 tons of supplies had been unloaded (largely by black service units), and the invaders controlled 70 miles of front, 5 to 15 miles deep. Within six weeks, the battle of Normandy was over and more than a million soldiers were ashore.[2]

Seventy-seven news correspondents accompanied the invasion, but the black journalists had to content themselves with filing from the London headquarters for more than a month. By mid-July, Toles, Stewart and Dixon were in France. For weeks, they were forced to write stories admitting they did not know which, if any, units went in on D-Day. They interviewed returning soldiers for accounts of black troops and put together what they could.

The traffic jam in the Channel was stupendous as men and supplies poured in to support the invasion. Toles, for example, spent five days aboard a ship, waiting to land. He had the foresight to interview men in the only barrage balloon unit in England, knowing they would be used in the invasion, so that provided his first story. He also did a general roundup, while Stewart wrote a travelogue-type piece and Dixon concentrated on the comfortable living in an amphibious truck unit. (As it turned out, the "duck" and balloon outfits were the first black units to be decorated by Eisenhower for their performances under fire.) Dunbar soon joined the other three, and all of them filed many stories during July, August and September about individual black units as the Allies raced across Europe. Sometimes it was all the journalists could do to keep up. Stewart was there when Paris was liberated August 23 ("I have never been

[2] See generally, Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1951); John F. Turner, *Invasion '44* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959); Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959).

kissed so much in all my life") and was with the second group into Brussels. The Germans were almost cleared from France by the middle of September.[3]

That fall, the Germans were also falling back in Italy, were reeling under the invasion of southern France, and seemed unable to cope with the advance along nearly a 1,000-mile front in Russia. To make matters worse, the Japanese fleet had taken a beating and was licking its wounds, and MacArthur was back in the Philippines.

Red Ball Express

Stewart was correct when on September 16 he reported that those running the supply operations were "hard put to keep up with the almost unbelievable advance of our armies." By then, the Allied armies had outrun their logistics and needed to reorganize and build and repair roads, airfields, bridges and rail lines before the final push into Germany. That's when the Red Ball Express came to the rescue.

One of the most publicized supply operations of the European war, the Red Ball Express operated for only 81 days, from August 25 to November 16, 1944. (But, then, the Pony Express didn't last very long, either.) Two-thirds of the men who loaded, serviced and drove the trucks on the Red Ball Express were black. At its peak, nearly 20,000 soldiers were involved around the clock. No other vehicles were permitted on the Red Ball roads. The same driver stayed with his truck, resting while it was serviced, for the whole run. The run was supposed to be a 400-mile, one-way loop, from near Normandy to west of Paris; however, before the route was abandoned for available rail and water transportation, it sometimes stretched to 600 miles.

The Army's official history says, "Despite the glamour given the Red Ball by press and radio, the work was hard, drab and monotonous . . . Red Ball men did a magnificent job, but at a tremendous expenditure in human effort, trucks, tires, gasoline, and oil."[4]

[3] Toles interview; *Defender*, July 15, 1944; *Afro-American*, July 15, August 12, September 2, 9 and October 10, 1944; *Courier*, July 15, 1944.

[4] Joseph Bykofsky and Harold Larson, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1957), p. 335.

The black journalists, of course, covered the Red Ball. They rode with the truckers and did features on the supply units. Ed Toles reported a ceremony where Eisenhower's aide halted a convoy to present a medal to a black corporal, who received it on behalf of all the GIs involved in the project. Rudy Dunbar found a mobile aviation quartermaster unit which had logged 2.5 million miles on the Red Ball.[5]

The Fall Campaigns

Black tankers, often attached in small numbers to white infantry units, saw much action during the fall stalemate. Toles accompanied one tank outfit as it helped First Army capture Aachen, the first German city to fall to the Allies. They gave close support to the infantrymen during intense door-to-door fighting in the ancient capital of Charlemagne.[6]

The 761st was the first black tank battalion in Europe, landing at Normandy in October with 676 enlisted men and with 30 of its 36 officers black. Their training record was excellent and their morale high. Shortly after their landing, Gen. Patton addressed them:

> I don't care what color you are, so long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sonsabitches. Everyone has their eyes on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to you. Don't let them down; don't let me down.[7]

The 761st didn't let anybody down, entering combat November 7 and remaining in it for the next 183 days. It fought in France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria, at various times attached to Third, Seventh and Ninth Armies. After watching them battle German tanks in a blinding snowstorm near Moselle, Stewart couldn't say enough in their praise.[8]

The unit lost 14 tanks during its first month of combat, but they were much easier to replace than the 113 men killed, injured or otherwise removed, and the unit stayed understrength throughout the war. Other black tank and tank destroyer units had the

[5] *Defender*, September 30, 1944; *Courier*, November 18, 1944.
[6] *Defender*, October 20, 1944.
[7] Quoted in Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 661.
[8] *Afro-American*, November 11, 18, 25, 1944.

same problem, since there were no available blacks trained as replacements.

There were seven black artillery battalions in the theater, but the heavy caliber units were attached to so many divisions that correspondents had trouble keeping track of them. Whenever they did find one, they would file a feature story; but of course they did the same for bakery, laundry and gasoline dump units. The army public information office turned out many such releases, too.

Toles wrote several stories about the black artilleryman attached to Third Army on its drive across the Brittany peninsula. In one he quoted a captured German officer as being amazed at their accuracy; in another he described counterfire during which three other correspondents were wounded and he hit the dirt and retreated to a farmhouse, only to have it tumble in on top of him.[9]

Battle of the Bulge

Hitler overruled his generals, both on the scope and the proper place for the counter-offensive, choosing the rugged, heavily-forested Ardennes sector for what could only succeed as a lightning thrust. When his men suggested they lacked vehicles, gasoline and ammunition to support a thrust as deep as the port of Antwerp, he berated them. Hitler greatly overestimated the strength of his own army, counting many "divisions" which consisted of little more than headquarters units. He was determined to drive a wedge between the Allied armies who were getting too close to the industrial Ruhr.[10]

Black artillerymen, tankers and service troops were with many of the units forced to retreat. When the Allies decided to hold Bastogne, the hub of the region's transport network, at all costs, the 101st Airborne reinforced the defenders, who included the black 969th Field Artillery Batallion. Attached to the 24th Infantry, the artillerymen fought much of the battle without direct communications from headquarters since the wires were cut on December 18 by mortar and machinegun fire. German

[9] *Defender*, September 2, 9, 23, 1944.

[10] Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1965), pp. 1-74.

infantrymen approached so near that the unit destroyed all its classified documents and all except the canonneers fought as riflemen. The guns were firing at range of 1,200 to 1,500 yards, about one-tenth their ma imum range. The unit took three terrific aerial bombardments, including one on Christmas Day, and before the skies cleared for the C-47s to drop food, the men were on one-third K-rations.

A part of Patton's Third Army reached the besieged defenders on December 26, the same day the Allied bombers got back into action. By then the ill-advised counter-offensive was ebbing fast. A month later, the lines had been restored and the Reich had lost 120,000 men and most of its armor and planes, none of which it could replace.

There were many tough battles ahead, but the German army would never be a real fighting force again; meanwhile, the Russians were rolling from the east.

The Final Drive

After Bastogne, the rest of the war was anti-climax. Toles joined the black tankers with Seventh Army and reported on their battering of the Siegfried Line and of opposing tanks. He watched the 969th and the 999th black howitzer units pound Colmar, near the Swiss border, and then accompanied another black tank unit with Ninth Army into Essen and Cologne, which he described as ghost towns. When he reached Brussels in April, he found it gayer than Paris.[11]

After Ollie Stewart's post-mortem on Bastogne, he headed for home after nearly three years in the war zone; however, he returned to report on postwar conditions.

Rudy Dunbar was trying to catch up with a black unit near Liege, when he asked some French civilians the direction. They shook their heads excitedly and pointed down the road where an American truck was smoking from a recent fire. That was the road, but they did not want him to go that way. A few moments later he saw an American convoy, driven by black GIs, headed for that same road. He managed to flag them down

[11] *Defender*, January 20 to April 21, 1945.

and give warning. Later he found out an entire German tank battalion was in waiting.[12]

When Ted Stanford hooked up with Ninth Army in March, it took him a while to find any black combat units. His first stories were about such support troops as the smoke-generating company which provided cover for the crossing of the Roer River, but soon he could write "from the cramped interior of a medium Sherman tank" to describe how the all-black 784th tank battalion on the banks of the Rhine was covering the advance of white infantrymen across a green meadow where cows grazed contentedly, unaware of the hell just over the next ridge.[13]

On May 5, the *Courier* carried Stanford's story under a big headline, "Tan Yanks Meet Red Army." One of the four all-black rifle platoons with Ninth Army's advance elements joined the Russians at the Elbe, near Torgau, on April 25, and Stanford covered the ceremony. He was greatly impressed by the mutual respect of the officers and men.

For the story of how that black platoon happened to be in a white unit, one needs to realize that the theater was feeling the pinch for infantry replacements by the summer of 1944, and the shortage became so serious by the end of the year that the army finally invited blacks in service units already in Europe to volunteer for training as riflemen. Some 4,500 responded, and about 2,800 were accepted for the six-week training which began in January. The training went well, and the all-black platoons went to various divisions in March.[14]

Stanford found enthusiasm high at the training center near Compeigne. He quoted a converted truck driver who said he was tired of getting shot at and wanted to do some shooting for a change. Some of them did not have to wait very long because they joined divisions ready to move across the Rhine. For once, combat commanders welcomed blacks, and that positive attitude no doubt played a role in the success which followed. The "experiment" was proclaimed a success by almost every com-

[12] *Courier*, January 13, 1945.
[13] *Courier*, April 7, 14, 21, 1945.
[14] Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 687-705; Dalfiume, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-101.

mander, and there were were almost no racial incidents until after the fighting ceased, at which time the black infantrymen were quickly converted back to service troops.[15]

Cologne and Dusseldorf fell on March 7, the same day American forces captured the Remagen Bridge across the Rhine before the Germans could demolish it. Allied forces poured across the Rhine and enveloped the Ruhr by April 18, capturing more than 300,000 German troops. The Russians entered Berlin April 24, and the city fell on May 2. Five days later, the Germans signed the surrender documents: however, V-E Day, the formal end of the war in Europe, did not come until May 8.

Vincent Tubbs was outside Innsbruck, Austria, when he and the other correspondents realized the war would be over within hours; however, they were forbidden to tell their home offices until the formal surrender. He recalls that everyone was sending strange cables to try to hint at the impending story:

> There was a guy who was our chief copy editor, Victor Gray, so I sat down and did this telegram: "Gray (who was back in Baltimore) has arrived." I thought they would figure it out easily. I thought they would say, "Gray, Victor? Victory has arrived!" Well, they never did understand it.[16]

Ed Toles reported the quiet happiness of the black soldiers poised at Marseilles as the war ended, waiting transfer to the Pacific Theater. There were rumors that both the 92d Division and the 332d Fighter Squadron might be transferred to that theater, but the army had no such plans. Toles enjoyed covering the departure of the first contingent of 7,000 blacks sailing for home.[17]

Surely one of the oddest assignments that fell to a correspondent was Rudy Dunbar's to conduct the famed Berlin Symphony. No non-German had wielded the baton since before the war, but Dunbar (the author of a standard text on the clarinet) received a fine ovation from the audience, which had no advance hint that the guest conductor would be black.[18]

[15] *Courier*, March 17, 24, 1945.
[16] Tubbs interview.
[17] *Defender*, September 1, 1945.
[18] *Journal & Guide*, September 8, 1945.

Stewart returned and reported that racial tensions in Germany were so high that black GIs dared not go out alone at night without arming themselves with nightsticks. Toles also filed stories about racial clashes in England and France. One of his last reported the Army's official verdict that the mixing of black and white infantry platoons had been a success.[19]

[19] *Afro-American*, December 22, 1945; *Defender*, June 30, September 29, 1945.

The Pacific

THE FIRST black GIs arrived in the Pacific in April, 1942. Their job was to build airstrips in New Guinea, and most of the 200,000 black soldiers who followed them had similar labor assignments. Their combat role was late and limited.

Allied grand strategy was to fight a holding action in the Pacific while defeating Germany; Japan, on the other hand, needed a quick victory because it lacked the industrial capacity for a prolonged war. During the first six months, the Japanese captured most of Southeast Asia, plus enough islands to endanger the supply route from the U.S. to Australia. The focus of that threat was Rabaul on New Britain, and it was to build airfields from which to attack Rabaul that the first black engineers came to New Guinea.[1]

Vincent Tubbs of the *Afro-American* and Fletcher Martin of NNPA arrived in Australia on the same ship after dodging torpedoes for 31 days in March, 1943; later came Enoc Waters of the *Defender*, Billy Rowe of the *Courier* and Charles Loeb of ANP. Late in the war, Francis Yancey replaced Tubbs.

Their frustration usually began with their formal welcome by General MacArthur. The general would not give interviews. Tubbs tells of trying to pass off his welcome handshake as an interview. Yancey, his replacement, did no better. He saw MacArthur getting into a jeep, rushed over and had his picture taken and hinted he was in deep conversation at the time. Rowe had some informal talks with the general but no real interviews.[2]

[1] Samuel Milner, *Victory in Papua* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1957), pp. 27-74.

[2] Waters, Rowe and Tubbs interviews; *Afro-American*, June 19, 1943, February 17, 1945.

New Guinea

Tubbs reported in the summer of 1943 that he was at the front in New Guinea, and his description summarizes most of the Pacific campaign: "There are none of our boys here, but a few miles back I saw them in large numbers in dump truck, quartermaster, railhead, engineer and ordnance outfits. They are in the thick of the work and as is always evident to me up here, their work is veritably indispensible."[3]

New Guinea is larger than Texas and Oklahoma combined, and, except for a range of mountains rising as high as 16,000 feet, is one hot, wet and malaria-ridden jungle—not the sort of place travel agents recommend. Waters called it "the land of dust and disgust," and the black soldiers called it even nastier names.

In November, Martin joined a patrol of black soldiers and knew for the first time the terror of being hunted from the sky by Japanese fighter planes. A week later, he moved to the front with some Australian troops and watched medium tanks in action for the first time in the campaign. He described "untidy piles of ghoulish corpses" and "maimed bodies, saturated with blood" in the wake of the fighting.[4]

New Britain

Waters and Tubbs found New Britain even worse and could understand why no European power had bothered to claim it for 300 years after its discovery. Germany built the fortress of Rabaul in 1880 and the League of Nations ceded it to Australia. The Australians did so little with New Britain that the Japanese took over little more than the great natural harbor in 1942, but immediately set to building five airfields and a modern port. They staged their invasions of both New Guinea and the Solomons from Rabaul, and the Allies feared Australia might be next.

Waters filed a colorful story from New Britain, in which he mentions his compatriot Tubbs:

Not long ago, you probably picked up your morning paper, and

[3] *Afro-American*, August 21, 1943.
[4] *Courier*, November 27, December 4, 1943.

over your bacon and eggs, scanned a headline reporting the capture of Hill 660 by the United States Marines in New Britain.

I doubt that you lingered over the story. I imagine you turned to something you regarded more interesting—the progress of the Russian campaign (Boy! They're really doing things over there): the latest about the forthcoming presidential election (I wonder if he'll try for a fourth term?), or the shortage of liquor stocks (seems that they ought to be able to release a couple of those distilleries by now).

Subconsciously as you turned the pages, you may have thought to yourself that news must be pretty scarce over there when highly paid correspondents devote so much space to the taking of a hill.

A hill! What's a hill in this global war? Now, if they'd taken the whole damn island, then . . . but a hill!

About the time you were glancing over these headlines and wondering when they're going to get started over here, I was standing on that hill. It was the morning after the night it had been taken.

With me was another correspondent, Vincent Tubbs of the *Afro-American*. As we began to scale the steep eminence—slimy with mud, cluttered with fallen trees, some shell shattered and swaying precariously above our heads, marred with bomb craters, littered with debris of recent battle—as we labored up that hill I began wondering what the reaction of the people back home was to the news of this victory.

To one who has sloshed through the sodden earth of the hill, seen and talked with the victorious marines—who, mud coated, raggedy, unshaven and dirty looked like anything but victors—the capture of that hill was an impossible feat. Outside the orderly room of a Negro port battalion in New Guinea, I saw a sign sometime ago. It read: "The impossible we'll do today, miracles can wait until tomorrow." Last night was "tomorrow" on that hill.

It was early morning when we left our camp several miles from the battleground and it was near noon when we approached the base of the hill. Our progress through a driving rain, sometimes in trucks which plowed slowly and with effort through mud a foot deep, sometimes on foot when each step was made with effort, was slow.

A truck came splashing and bouncing along behind us, halting occasionally while its wheels churned deep into the soft earth seeking traction. We hailed it and climbed aboard gratefully.

Metal containers of hot food and coffee slid about on the slimy floor and rainsoaked marines held on to its sides to keep their footing.

"Going all the way up?" we inquired.

"Impossible for a truck," a fellow sitting next to the driver said.

"We gotta transfer this chow to a tank. It's the only thing that'll make the climb."

We judged ourselves fourth the way up, when the truck bogged down at a regimental command post. "Whew, just made it," the driver exclaimed leaning back and lighting a cigaret.

A few pyramidal tents dropped from their poles like half opened umbrellas. Soldiers lay about on mounds of leaves, little islands in a sea of mud.

Ahead lay a sloping, drenched and dreary jungle, a tangle of heavy vegetation which seemed impassable.

Several men sitting solemnly on a log ignoring the beating rain pointed out a barely discernible trail. "You'll find a wire there, just follow it up," they directed.

Hitching up our pants, now heavy with mud and water, we proceeded through the swamp pushing aside branches and parting head high grass with our hands. We splashed through a swiftly running stream, and I felt the water oozing through my jungle shoes.

There seemed to be no level ground and raising our eyes occasionally we could see no end of the trail which seemed to run into the sky. Losing his footing, my companion slipped and fell flat in the mud.

"How in the hell did they get up this damn hill last night?" he asked angrily.

"Don't know," I answered, trying to conceal my amusement. I was thankful for my soggy jungle shoes which gave me surer footing.

Then something happened and instinctively both of us fell flat in mud. Cautiously we looked about us. We got to our feet gradually. All was quiet. A few yards to one side we saw a huge tree which had fallen. We looked at each other—secretly ashamed of our fears—and smiled. Our thoughts were identical.

A marine had told us that about 80 Jap snipers had broken through the lines last night and were believed to be loose in the area. "Keep an eye peeled for them" he had warned us.

We had not progressed far before a hoarse voice called to us. Hardly visible in the bush was a lean-to hurriedly constructed from a shelter half. The front end barely cleared the heads of the two men who sat at a telephone switchboard.

We greeted them and they returned friendly smiles. "What outfit you from?" they inquired.

"We're war correspondents."

"That so," they exclaimed, a note of interest in their voices. "Where were you last night?"

"Not here, you can bet. Kinda hot, wasn't it?"

"Kinda! Say this was the toughest thing we've ever been through. Hell, Guadalcanal was a picnic to this."

Three men in dirty uniforms passed. Seeing us, one stopped and inquired about our presence on the hill. We identified ourselves as correspondents.

"It's all right," he said, "we just don't want any souvenir hunters wandering through here. It's too dangerous." He signed our cards, a colonel in the USMC. "Going to the top?"

"We hope to."

"Good, the boys have some swell stories up there. They did a fine job here last night," he commented looking about him at the debris.

When he walked away, Weiss said, "He's a real soldier. Right up front there last night, he was, cheering the guys up and all. He's got plenty guts."

Back at the switchboard, I joined Tubbs in time to climb aboard a tank taking chow to the advance command post three quarters the way to the top of the hill.

Here we were met by death again, this time one of our own. Seated solemnly about the body lying face down on a litter, were several marines who told this story.

"Volunteered to lead a machine gun raid. A sixty got him right here." The speaker pointed to his own stomach.

Across the tank trail was a first aid station where I was surrounded by marines plying me with questions.

"We've been here 21 days now, no clothes, no baths, no shaves, no nothing. We stink like hell."

"How far to the top?"

"You going up there?" they asked.

"Yes."

"Well, about a hundred and fifty yards and straight up."

Off to one side through the trees I could see several marines moving about. "Looking for stragglers," Pvt. Fred Lamprez of Springfield, Ill. informed me.

When I returned to the little knot of men sitting about their fallen comrade where I'd left my companion, he'd disappeared. Reading the question in my mind, PH.M. 2-c John Fullerton, Middletown, N. Y., pointed off in the bushes. "Your buddy went that way to see a dead Jap."

I walked upon the scene a little suddenly and I wasn't prepared for what I saw. Flat on his back, with arms flung out from his sides, and with head blown off, there he was. I stared at the repulsive sight. Flies buzzed about and stench filled the air. I didn't linger.

Finding Tubbs, we set out to climb to the crest of the hill. It was an ascent that had to be made on all fours. In the lead, I'd grab a root, a stone, or anything by which I could pull myself up.

From the hill top one can view the Borgen bay area where the Japs, driven back, are bivouacked. Occasional gun and machine gun fire was holding them at bay.

Returning to where the tank trail ended we expended as much energy to keep from tumbling down as we had used in reaching the top. There we caught a tank going down. On the floor was the body of the marine we had seen before.

"Hang on," the driver would shout and up we would go over a fallen tree, all of us tumbling backward. Then the tank halfway over the tree would teeter like a see-saw, then crash down throwing every one forward in a heap. I have never been jerked, tossed and banged around so much in my life.

Halfway down, we came to one of those sudden halts a tank can make. Maj. Gen. William H. Rupertus, commander of the task force which made the Cape Glouceśter landing climbed aboard, spoke in a friendly manner and accepted a seat next to the driver in the cab of the tank.

At the regimental command post, before he alighted, he paused to congratulate and thank the driver. It was the end of our tank ride and from there, we thumbed our way back.

"What's a hill in a global war?" you ask.

Ask the guys who took it.[5]

The capture of Hill 660 was of more tactical importance than Waters hinted or perhaps knew, since it ended the bloody New Gloucester operation. The Marines spent the next three months in a deadly game of hide-and-seek with the Japanese, but fighting was small-scale and sporadic. By late April, the 135,000 defenders retreated to the Rabaul enclave where they spent the rest of the war, awaiting an assault that didn't come because it wasn't needed once Rabaul had been neutralized.

Bougainville

The black correspondents had little combat to report in 1943 as MacArthur moved across New Guinea and Admiral King up the Solomon Islands, both pointing toward New Britain. In

[5] *Defender*, February 5, 1944.

March, 1944, the first black regiment saw combat at Bougainville, *the largest and northernmost of the Solomon chain.*

After the bloody fighting at Guadalcanal, the U.S. never tasted defeat in that theater again. Black troops played a relatively minor role in the fighting at Guadalcanal, but both Martin and Loeb were there. As soon as the fighting ended, boredom settled in again. Martin, acting on a tip that the 24th Infantry Regiment would be the first to usher black soldiers into combat as rifleman, attached himself to that unit. At Bougainville, he met Rowe, who had been covering the 93d since its training days in California.[6]

Rowe was recommended for a Silver Star for helping bring out wounded Americans. He survived a patrol from the Americal Division which was hit by Japanese fire, and when he got to camp he told a colonel he thought he could find his way back. "Nobody does that at night in the jungle," he says, but eight GIs followed him back to the clearing, loaded the men on litters, and Rowe packed all eight of their rifles on his shoulders. About half way back, they were pinned down by enemy fire, circled around their attackers, and killed three Japanese with bayonets. To add insult to injury, the American sentries at first refused to believe they were friendly since they never had known U.S. patrols to return after dark. But the men were saved.[7]

The 15,000 defenders on Bougainville were cut off from air and naval support by the time the 24th went into the perimeter, but on March 8 the Japanese launched a suicidal counter-attack which in nine furious days cost them 5,000 men. Martin's report was enthusiastic: the men of the 24th "have tasted blood and suddenly become hounds out for the kill. They don't want just revenge, they want to clear the Japs out of Bougainville. They're 'out of the kitchen' and off to the war at long last!"[8]

But it proved to be a short-lived war. For the next six weeks, the black units helped mop up Bougainville, and it was during this period than an inexperienced company of the 93d panicked

[6] *Journal & Guide*, January 1-29, 1944; Rowe interview; Martin (personal correspondence, April 29, 1971).

[7] Rowe interview.

[8] Defender, March 25, 1944; John Miller, *Cartwheel: The Reduction of Rabaul* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1959), pp. 351-78.

under enemy attack and retreated, leaving its company officers on the line. The black papers mentioned neither the incident nor the investigating panel's conclusion that most of the casualties were caused by the company's own confused firing. Years later, Gen. George C. Marshall still referred to the 93d as the division that wouldn't fight at Bougainville.[9]

The Final Campaigns

That questionable performance may have contributed to the reduced combat role for black units in the Philippines and at Okinawa. At Hollandia and elsewhere, former riflemen poured concrete and unloaded ships, while the black journalists saw more action than the black troops. Martin had to be rescued by a PT boat after joining Filipino guerrillas for what was supposed to be a routine mission on the small island of Samar, and Loeb saw a kamikaze attack from the deck of a ship under attack in the Lingayen Gulf. Waters was closer to the shooting at Okinawa than at any place in the war, but at all those battles, the blacks were mostly in support and service units.

Loeb watched MacArthur return civil powers to the brown-skinned president of the Philippines and was touched when the general planted a welcome-home kiss on the brow of the president's wife. "As a Negro reporter," he wrote, "the significance of this climactic gesture was not lost to a mind trained to search for tangible manifestations of the white man's sincerity."[10]

Waters, Loeb, Brooks and Rowe were among the more than 200 journalists who watched the Japanese sign the surrender aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, but Waters and Loeb had a more eventful time the day before. With three white correspondents, they had the distinction of being the first Americans into Tokyo, arriving before MacArthur through some clerical error in their travel request from the U.S. command headquarters in Yokohama.

"We could have been killed," Loeb says. "People just looked at us and bowed, and we bowed back. There wasn't an American soldier in the whole city. We went down in the Ginza and bought souvenirs. We went to the Imperial Hotel and had

[9] Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 508-12. Rowe says he never heard of the incident.
[10] *Journal & Guide*, April 7, 1945.

dinner—and we came back to write our stories and almost got thrown out of the theater."[11]

For the next few weeks, the journalists visited Japan and various island outposts to report on the eagerness of the soldiers to get home, an eagerness they could understand and shared.

[11] Loeb interview (Cleveland, June 22, 1971). Waters recalls it the same way.

Highways and Byways

THE TIDE of global war creates many eddies and backwaters, and blacks served in most of them—handling cargo, driving trucks and building and maintaining roads. Correspondents for the black papers accompanied them everywhere, including the deserts of Iran, the mountains of Burma and the frozen plains of Alaska.[1] One black journalist even spent the war filing dispatches from the Russian Front, one of the few places blacks did not serve.

Iran Supply Route

The United States was committed to giving top priority for Lend-Lease shipments to Russia, but the logical supply routes were cut off. Although Iran offered the best alternative, it raised horrendous political problems. Censorship was strict, both because of international difficulties and because neither the Russians nor the Western allies wanted the Germans to know the size of the operation.[2]

One black correspondent, Frank Bolden of NNPA, spent four months in Iran's sizzling heat. It was 146 degrees when he arrived in September, 1944—rather typical for the long summer season. Although heatstroke took its toll, the number of man-days lost through illness was lower than the worldwide army average.

The post battalions, which Bolden reported were the "toast of the command," were all-black. In the theater as a whole, about

[1] For fuller treatment see John D. Stevens, "Black Correspondents of World War II Cover the Supply Routes," *Journal of Negro History*, 57:395-406 (October 1972).

[2] In 1941 Russia and England invaded to overthrow a pro-Nazi regime, and with the flow of Lend-Lease, the U.S. became a third contender for post-war influence, especially in oil arrangements. Joseph Bykofsky and Harold Larson, *The Transportation Corps: Operations Overseas* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1957); Diane S. Clemens, *Yalta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 245-58.

10 per cent were blacks. The men did most of their work in the "cool" of the morning and evening, but it still could be 120 degrees in the hull of a ship at midnight.

Planes could be ferried to Russia from American-built airfields in Iran (although Bolden and other writers were not permitted to write about this phase of the operation), but there were not enough planes to carry many supplies.

The Army decided to build and improve both rail and highway routes so that in case the railroad was bombed (which it never was), there still would be a way to get supplies into southern Russia. The engineers, many of them black, graded, filled and sanded 60 miles of road to connect the port with the Trans-Iranian Railroad, which they also maintained and manned. The railroad supplied four times the tonnage of the highway, but the highway was late in getting started since it required so much construction. The engineers also built assembly plants where Lend-Lease parts landed at the port were turned into usable trucks and motorized barges.

By the time Bolden arrived, the American operation in Iran was already beginning to wind down. The peak month was July, 1944, when 282,000 long tons were delivered; however, by then, other and shorter supply routes were available, so the Americans began to pull out and closed the Persian Gulf Command June 1, 1945, some six weeks after the Germans surrendered.

Like any newsmen, Bolden chafed under the strict security censorship in Iran, although he admits it was necessary. He was frustrated at not being able to write about the air base or the switch from gasoline to diesel trucks.

Because of the censorship, most of Bolden's stories were "soft." He visited Camp Stalingrad, the transfer point in the mountains of northeastern Iran for supplies from Americans to Russians, who drove them into the USSR. Bolden found about 10 per cent of the Americans at Camp Stalingrad were black. On another visit, he described life in an all-black bakery unit along the supply route. He talked with black truckers on the route and visited "Little Detroit," an assembly plant for trucks.[3]

[3] Bolden interview; *Courier*, October 21, 28, 1944; Cleveland *Call & Post*, November 4, 1944; Kansas City *Call*, November 17, 1944.

Given the frustrations of reporting from such a command, Frank Bolden was not unhappy when his orders came—literally in the middle of his Christmas dinner—to report immediately for a new assignment. His new post: Burma.

The Ledo Road

Black troops carved the Ledo Road out of some of the world's densest jungles and then drove convoys across it to a beleaguered China.

The first contingent of black engineers arrived in December, 1942. Before the road was completed, some 15,000 Americans had strained their muscles on it, and 60 per cent of them were black.

Here as everywhere else, black correspondents shared their hardships. Deton J. Brooks of the Chicago *Defender* arrived in India in October, 1944, the first American black correspondent in the China-Burma-India Theater. Soon he moved to Burma to cover the road construction. In January, 1945, Bolden joined him.

Both knew that the road, like everything else in that enigmatic part of the world, was entwined in power struggles, both among the Allies and among the Americans themselves. In the global strategy of Europe-first, CBI was a tiny part of the Pacific side-show, useful for tying down several Japanese divisions and as an eventual springboard for bombing of the home islands. The strategy was to do only enough to keep China in the war. The Americans wanted Chiang Kai-shek to use his three to four million soldiers, but Chiang was husbanding them to use against the Chinese Communists in the north. Chiang wanted control over all Lend-Lease, but the Americans were having none of that.

As if the rifts were not damaging enough, there also was a dramatic clash in personalities and ideologies between the two major American commanders in the theater. One was General Joseph Stilwell; the other was Claire Chennault.[4]

Stilwell insisted that an overland supply route would be needed to support any large-scale bombing of the Japanese home islands

[4] See generally, Barbara Tuchman, *Stillwell and the American Experience in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington: Office of Chief of Military History, 1956).

from Chinese bases, and the War Department, which then expected the war to last until 1947 or 1948, agreed. Chennault insisted he could provide plenty of supplies "Over the Hump" if they weren't drained off for what he considered a futile attempt to recapture northern Burma on the ground. Chiang sided with Chennault, since aerial supply did not involve his soldiers and got the material to him without passing through domains of hostile and potentially rival war lords, who routinely "taxed" shipments.[5]

Both Bolden and Brooks stayed with the troops, swatting mosquitoes, pulling out jungle leeches and watching out for 300 kinds of snakes. Doctors were forced to treat new strains of typhus and other diseases, and always there was dysentery. Brooks spent 14 days in a field hospital recovering from a jeep accident. Bolden, who visited and wrote about both black-staffed hospitals along the road, recalled years later, "Medical contingents said it wasn't an area for white personnel. Whether it was true or not, the blacks made it. That's the best test I know."[6]

The military, with its mystical belief in the special adaptability of blacks to jungle climates, turned to black laborers. Although most of them were from the South, they never had tried to build roads in an area with 150 inches of rain a year, where torrents could raise rivers 11 feet in a day, where the roads became yellow soup, and the jungle reclaimed sections faster than they could be cleared. Bolden quoted one GI: "The only difference between hell and the jungle is that hell is supposed to be dry."

Bolden could be eloquent even in retelling a story which had occurred before he arrived in Burma. Men working on the Ledo Road told him of the heroic death of Pfc. Otto Stringer, Jr. of Birmingham, Alabama, and Bolden relayed it to the world. The Norfolk *Journal & Guide* devoted almost three columns to the story, six months after it happened.

According to Bolden, Stringer had been walking a routine frosty traffic guard one morning in January, 1945, when he realized the truck roaring toward him was out of control. The driver and his passenger were both white men.

[5] Leland Stowe exposed such racketeering in a 1941 newspaper series, and in *They Shall Not Sleep* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), pp. 62-85.

[6] Bolden interview.

Suddenly, the truck careened crazily and ran straight into the bank at the foot of the hill near where Stringer was walking his post. As it crashed into the soft earth, the vehicle knocked over one of the flares. The quick thinking sentry hastened towards the tangled wreck. The driver yelled to him to keep his distance because there was high-explosive powder aboard. But the brave GI Samaritan disregarded the warning and kept advancing. He would help them.

He had moved but a few yards towards the trapped occupants of the truck, when the powder exploded, and all were instantly enveloped by the searing flames. It was indeed a miracle that they were not killed right there on the spot.

Other guards and GIs, hearing the explosion, hurried to the scene and arrived in time to see the gallant Stringer, his entire body aflame, tugging with almost superhuman strength at the helpless, burning soldiers in the cab of the truck. He was able to free them, and then proceeded to carry the victims, one by one, several yards to safety.

A volunteer rescue squad tried to move in to aid the wounded soldiers, but had to pause momentarily because the flames were too hot. When it was able to penetrate the ring of fire, it found the two white soldiers conscious, the "human torch" unconscious. The squad wrapped the cinder-like forms in blankets and carried them to the hospital, a few miles away.

Soon after his admittance, Stringer regained consciousness and with his face etched deeply with agony lines from the excrutiating pain, mumbled through puffed lips that he wanted a chaplain. To him he made his confession, and bade farewell to all of his dreams and post-war ambitions. Then he lapsed into a delerious coma, and in his delerium murmured repeatedly about all of those things which home meant to him.

He died without learning that his rescued companions would live. They buried him in the bowels of the green hell of the jungle, where the cruel fates of war had decreed that he be sent to serve the cause of liberty. His name is a legend among the men here along the Road.[7]

Advance survey parties sometimes ran into Japanese patrols, and the roadhead was in constant danger of skirmishes, to say nothing of snipers. Nonetheless, the road inched forward, around the clock. At night, by the light of smudge pots and flaming oil cans, black GIs jockeyed their 16-ton bulldozers along the edges of 500-foot deep gulleys. The lead bulldozer crossed into Burma

[7] *Journal & Guide*, July 21, 1945.

in February. Then the monsoons came, and the road advanced only three miles from May to August. A new commander took over in September and announced "From now on we're forgetting this defeatist spirit. The Ledo Road is going to be built—mud, rain, and malaria be damned." The road reached Shingbwiyang four days ahead of its scheduled January 1 deadline. A suitable celebration marked the accomplishment when a convoy brought in 96,000 cans of beer.[8]

Stilwell was delighted, and in New Delhi in January, 1944, told the press that the road builders were "continuing to do the impossible." One way they did it was by cutting a few corners. For example, Army regulations prohibit grades steeper than 10 degrees, but one enterprising engineer found a faulty clinometer that would register no more than 11 degrees and hauled it out for suspicious inspectors. They never argued about one degree, but they would have had they known some of the grades were nearly 20 degrees.[9]

Construction schedules suffered when engineers were pulled off the road to build support air strips and to do maintenance work on the road. Bolden described in the *Courier* on June 9, 1945, how black engineers poured 20,000 cubic yards of concrete on one airstrip in 34 days under soggy 125-degree conditions.

In spite of all the frustrations, the first convoy was ready to roll in January, 1945. (By then, Stilwell had been relieved). Suddenly, Chiang decreed that no black soldiers could enter China. He said their sudden appearance in the remote regions of Western China might upset the natives, but Bolden says the real reason was that Mme. Chiang was afraid of race mixing.[10]

Forty correspondents of many nations rode in that first convoy, and among them were Bolden and Brooks. Both of them were unaware until the 113 trucks moved out that there were no black drivers. The laborers saw it at once, and both correspondents scurried around to find out the reason. The Army's explanation was that it had assigned the ceremonial convoy to the most experienced truck unit and that this unit happened to

[8] Leslie Anders, *The Ledo Road* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965); Romanus and Sunderland, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-41.

[9] Anders, *ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

[10] Bolden interview. Brooks is less convinced of the reason.

be all-white. Both Bolden and Brooks deny there was any unit at all; it was a pickup group. Bolden says, "No one truck unit could be spared for that long. They were going to bring in new white troops." Bolden flew back to headquarters, registered his protest, and the Army sent 11 blacks to join the convoy a few miles up the road.[11]

The convoy was greeted in every town with banners and ceremonies. One town even posted a sign which read: "Welcome Honorable Correspondents." Twice they were halted, once for eight days, while combat troops cleared the area ahead of Japanese suicide squads. At one stop, Bolden visited a welcome-home ceremony for the famed Burma Surgeon, Dr. Gordon Seagrave. In some villages, the Chinese gawked at the blacks, embarrassing and angering some of the drivers. Bolden learned through an interpreter that they were not hostile but only amazed that men of so many pigmentations all spoke the same language.

Both correspondents kept an eye on the movement for independence which was swelling in India, and when Ghandi and Nehru were released from jail in the spring of 1945, both went to India to interview the leaders and to cover a high-level conference on Indian unity. Ghandi sent messages of good will to American blacks through both, although Brooks' interview was difficult, to say the least. The Mahatma was observing a day of silence; he wrote out his answers on a small pad.[12]

Brooks, who had studied international relations at the University of Chicago, said one of his big problems was convincing the Army public information officers that he was interested in more than black troops. "I wanted to know what was happening in that section of the world," he says. "I chose the Far East because I saw there, although the war wasn't as big, the social implications of what was happening as far more significant."[13]

When the first atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, Bolden was in Burma and Brooks was in Chungking. The Chinese delegates to the surrender ceremony agreed to take along eight Western journalists, three of whom would represent the wire services.

[11] Bolden and Brooks interviews. Bolden's series on the trip was published in several papers, including *Journal & Guide* (March 17 to May 12, 1945).

[12] *Courier*, July 7, 1945; *Defender*, June 16, 1945.

[13] Brooks interview.

The 30 other correspondents would have to elect three of their own to go, and Brooks won, partly, he admits, because he was not in direct competition with any of the others.[14]

The jungle reclaimed the Ledo Road within weeks after the surrender. It cost $150 million and 1,133 American lives, and it never carried the tonnage to justify such outlays, partly because the war ended more quickly than was anticipated. But to the men who bullied that road from some of the world's most unfriendly terrain, the memory lives on.

The Alaska Highway

The Alaska Highway was also a military disappointment, made obsolete before its completion by the string of victories in the Pacific. Unlike the Ledo Road, however, the Alaska Highway was a useful legacy in the postwar world.

More than 10,000 American GIs spent the war building and maintaining the road, and 3,700 of them were blacks. It was lonely, finger-numbing and back-breaking labor. The Baltimore *Afro-American* sent Herbert M. Frisby to these god-forsaken outposts twice, during the summers of 1943 and 1944. He traveled by plane, train, jeep and truck, the only black journalist to visit the theater.

A highway link to Alaska had been "too expensive" in peacetime, but when the Japanese threatened West Coast shipping, the President authorized a pioneer road in 1942. Black engineers built from the north and white engineers from the south. Together they blazed 1,636 miles and linked up before the bitter cold set in.

Yank called the link-up "symbolic not alone of the completion of the road to Alaska but also of the manner of its construction. The first land route in history linking America with its largest territory has been a product of Negro and white troops in the U.S. Army."[15]

Only a few trucks bumped along the rugged trail that winter, and in the spring work began on widening and building it into a real highway. It was assumed Alaska would be a major staging

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Yank, the Army Weekly* (February 10, 1943). Author was Richard Neuberger, later U.S. Senator from Oregon.

area for the Pacific campaign and perhaps a supply point for Russia. The GIs labored throughout the summer of 1943 to make the road capable of carrying 10-ton trucks, transporting 200,000 tons a month. As it turned out, there were almost no 10-ton trucks available in the fall. By then, it was obvious that Americans were advancing too fast in the Pacific to make use of Alaska. A token 54 tons of military supplies moved that fall, although many more tons of supplies were trucked to the construction crews. Water transport was still cheaper and faster.[16]

With almost no real news to report, Frisby sent back folksy features, often crammed with lists of black soldiers he had met. A mosquito which he measured to be "with a wingspan of 1¼ inches, legs 1⅜ each and body length ⅝ inch" intrigued him as much as watching President Roosevelt during his visit to troops on the Aleutian Islands. Frisby interviewed a black GI who lit FDR's cigar, only to learn the President asked him what he missed most and got the expected reply: "Our girls." In one story, Frisby swore the winds were so strong that they blew the spit back in your mouth. In another, he reprinted graffiti (presumably bowdlerized) from barracks walls. He assured the girls back home that the only native females were "trout, salmon, flounders, bears, foxes, eagles, halibut and a few mosquitos." In barren Kotzebue, he came across a shrewd native who, when Frisby wanted to haggle about the price of seal fur, cut Frisby down by calling him a "no good white man." The *Afro-American's* man did not argue the point.[17]

The Eastern Front

Since there were no American troops—let alone black American troops—in Russia, why would there be a special correspondent for the black press in that theater?

The answer centers around a fascinating newsman who wrote under the name of Chatwood Hall, but whose real name was Homer Smith. Discouraged when the only job he could get after graduation from the University of Minnesota was as a postal clerk, Smith headed for Russia in 1932. He found the postal service there even more inefficient, quit his job, and became a

[16] Bykofsky and Larson, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-68.

[17] *Afro-American*, August 12 to October 7, 1944.

Moscow correspondent for several newspapers, including the Baltimore *Afro-American*, the Pittsburgh *Courier* and the Chicago *Defender*. He later added many "white" publications to his client list.

"I represented those papers as their resident correspondent," he explains. "I never was a free-lancer. They paid me a salary, and I had cable facilities."[18]

His by-line appeared regularly in black papers from 1935 to 1946. For part of that time, he worked for Associated Negro Press, and beginning in 1944 he was with the Associated Press bureau in Moscow, writing under his real name.

He became the first accredited black correspondent of the war, not by design but because he was in the war zone when the Germans attacked in June, 1941. He was still in Moscow when the rest of the correspondents had fled. That was a result neither of bravery nor the attempt to gain a journalistic scoop, but rather that he and his Russian wife missed the special evacuation train.

> It happened that I was the only Negro journalist ever stationed in Russia. I was the only Negro war correspondent on the Russian-German front, and if it can be carried even a bit further, I was the first Negro to be accredited a war correspondent. This was not a calculated achievement. I had just happened to be on the scene when the shooting started and all of the civilian correspondents were placed on war footing.[19]

The *Courier* inquired about sending a correspondent to Moscow, but the Russians already had more foreign journalists than they wanted. There were Americans, British, French, Spanish and Japanese correspondents, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assigned and transported to various parts of the 2,000 mile front. Curiously, Smith never saw a Russian war correspondent.

Smith was on the move so much and mail was so disrupted that he almost never saw his articles in print and sometimes did not receive his checks—and not always because of logistics. He always was arguing with ANP about payment and finally quit

[18] Smith interview, Chicago, June 17, 1971.

[19] Homer Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1964), p. 172.

the service when he received four books in lieu of his monthly check.

The tide turned on the Eastern Front in 1943, due in no small measure to the American and British equipment which was pouring in. The year began with the crushing of Hitler's once-invincible Sixth Army at Stalingrad. Three years before, this same German army had rolled through France and Belgium; after the suicidal stand, at Der Fuhrer's insistence, at Stalingrad, it never was an effective fighting force again. Smith was covering the northern front at the time and missed Stalingrad. "That was a huge theater. You simply could not be everywhere," he says.

Smith was impressed by the discipline of the Russian soldiers and their ability to withstand deprivations. He recalls being almost gagged while waiting in a closed bunker with some troops. He asked what that awful smell was, and a soldier offered him some of his improvised tobacco—dried horse manure rolled in newspapers. But the soldiers and correspondents always got their vodka ration, and Smith finally learned to gulp it by the water-glass.[20]

He learned the American papers were far more interested in stories on social conditions than on reports of combat. He interviewed about every black, American or African, who ventured into Moscow. "They always wanted a story with racial overtones," he says. So, when he reported on the Nazi murder of Jews in Russia, he emphasized the racial minority status of the victims, and when he wrote about Pushkin's kin, he pointed out how dark the author's skin had been. When he visited an extermination camp, he checked its records to see haw many victims had been dark.

He found the Russians themselves had little racial consciousness and felt that he was treated well.

Press censorship under Stalin was very strict, and all cables had to be cleared in advance. Sometimes a censor would tell Smith that he had to make a change, but at other times the censor would make the changes without consulting with the author. That resulted in some garbled stories and some confused wires and letters from his American papers. Like any reporter

[20] Smith interview.

Smith learned what he could get past the censor and what he might as well not bother with. For example, when he visited the mass graves in the Katyn Forest in early 1944, he felt it was as likely that the Russian secret police as the Nazi soldiers had done the shooting, but "to file a story that the Russians had done it would have been an out and out provocation."

Another thing he never dared write about which intrigued him was the lack of Russian graves. As the tides of war moved back and forth, he often saw German graveyards. "I always suspected the Russians burned their corpses," he says.[21]

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WHAT KIND of job did the black correspondents do? Generally, an able one. They turned out prodigious amount of copy, most of it solidly if not spectacularly written, and they made the war easier to bear, both for the black soldiers and for their loved ones at home.

Any war correspondent has a difficult assignment, but the blacks had extra problems. Although they suffered little discrimination themselves (and in fact their task of locating and writing about black troops was made easier by segregation policies), they saw it and reported it. They accepted the unenviable extra task of being ombudsmen for the GIs with their largely white officers. They stayed with the troops and did a minimum of "headquarters hugging."

They didn't win any journalistic prizes, mostly because they were writing for blacks about blacks. Likewise, they seldom covered the main thrust of the war because blacks seldom had a role in that combat; instead they did the tough, thankless job of writing about support troops who were doing tough, thankless jobs. When they were in the midst of combat, they still knew

[21] *Ibid.*

the dailies would have much fuller coverage about the tide of battle.

The 27 correspondents did a professional job, and while they deserve more credit than they received, so do their editors and publishers. After all, there were more than 10,000 weekly newspapers in the United States, and those four were the only ones who cared enough to finance their own correspondents.